Volume IV.
Number 17.

Week of
October 25, 1943

New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

INDEX

Stage Play	Pages
*All for All	271, 272, 273
*Another Love Story	260, 261, 262
Apology	351, 352, 353
Ask My Friend Sandy	378, 379, 380
Barber Had Two Sons (The)	383, 384, 385
Blossom Time	286, 287, 288
Boy Meets Girl	316, 317
Bright Lights of 1944	276, 277, 278
Chauve Souris 1943	298, 299, 300
Counterattack	380, 381, 382
Dark Eyes	390, 391, 392
*Early to Bed	314, 315, 316
Family (The)	344, 345, 346
First Million (The)	330, 331, 332
For Your Pleasure	374, 375, 376
Hairpin Harmony	269, 270
*Harriet	364, 365, 366
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358
Land of Fame	274, 275, 276
*Laugh Time	284, 285, 286
Men in Shadow	360, 361, 362
*Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303
Milky Way (The)	317
Moon Vine (The)	372, 373, 374
Murder Without Crime	293, 294, 295
My Dear Public	281, 282, 283
†*Naked Genius (The)	253, 254, 255
*New Life (A)	279, 280, 281
Nine Girls	393, 394, 395
*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
*One Touch of Venus	264, 265, 266
†*Othello	256, 257, 258
Patriots (The)	385, 386, 387, 388
Richard III	348, 349, 350
Run Little Chillun	296, 297, 298
Snark Was a Boojum (The)	288, 289, 290
*Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
Sons and Soldiers	325, 326, 327
Student Prince (The)	320, 321, 322
This Rock	369, 370, 371
Those Endearing Young Charms	318, 319, 320
*Three's a Family	228, 329, 330
*Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
Try and Get It	306, 307, 308
*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
Vagabond King (The)	311, 312, 313
*Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

PRODUCTIONS CONTINUING

Reviews appeared in the 1942 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

Stage Play	Pages
*Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126
*Janie	244, 245, 246
*Rosalinda	187, 188, 189
*Star and Garter	262, 263, 264

Reviews appeared in the 1941 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
*Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420
*Life With Father	489, 490, 491
*Tobacco Road	498, 499, 500

*Asterisks indicate shows schedu'ed to play week of October 25, 1943.

†*"Othello" opened Tuesday, October 19th, at the Shubert Theatre.*

†*"The Naked Genius" opened Thursday, October 21st, at the Plymouth Theatre.*

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELGERAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

Published by

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS 235 East 22nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription
$15.00

"The Naked Genius"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 22, 1943

Naked, But No Genius

By HOWARD BARNES

GYPSY ROSE LEE, the gifted graduate of the burlesque grind, has written a play about strip-teasing and such are the vagaries of the theater that it arrived at the Plymouth last night. She might better have stuck to bumps. For "The Naked Genius," as she calls her comedy, is very bad indeed. Even though it has had the ministrations of so eminent a director as George S. Kaufman, it is more often vulgar than funny. A large cast, including several dogs and a monkey, scramble through the doings in the show, but it rarely succeeds in making them agreeably antic.

• • •

To the great credit of the author and Mr. Kaufman, they are reliably reported to have been opposed to a Broadway opening of the play, after the try-out. Michael Todd, the producer, who has pulled more than one fat rabbit out of his hat in recent seasons, is responsible for the latest lapse in good taste and craftsmanship that can be charged against the stage. He may have a success on his hands in these lean days of the theater, but he has not added to the genuine gaiety of town. "The Naked Genius" is a dull whimsy, full of stale gags and inept performing.

• • •

It might have been better had Miss Lee herself appeared in her burlesque. Joan Blondell, who has confined her acting to the screen for a dozen years, is woefully ill at ease in the part of a burlesque queen who has a book ghost-writer for her and almost marries a rich and social publisher. The material is never good and sometimes terrible, but she might have been expected to do far more than she does with a broad farcical role. Millard Mitchell, as the G-string gal's agent, is far better at gleaning a bit of amusement out of obvious situations, and several of the bit players out-do the principals at every turn.

It is difficult to see what Kaufman had to do with this mishap. There is almost no scene in which his impeccable timing and feeling for sharp characterization is apparent. Maybe he just gave up trying to stage a cumbersome comedy. Certainly there have been few shows this fall in which the performers flounder so helplessly. Mitchell, as already noted, makes the most of old jokes and corny business, as he portrays a recognizable figure in the less reputable fringe of the amusement business. Phyllis Povah is all right as the strip-teaser's unscrupulous mother, and Bertha Belmore and Georgia Sothern have some moments of lusty humor. There is far too little of it in "The Naked Genius." On the whole, it is both vulgar and boring.

'THE NAKED GENIUS'

Play by Gypsy Rose Lee; staged by George S. Kaufmann; settings by Frederick Fox; costumes by Billy Livingston; presented by Michael Todd at the Plymouth Theater, Thursday, October 21, 1943. The cast:

Honey Bee Carroll	Joan Blondell
Angela	Pauline Myers
Stuart Tracy	Millard Mitchell
Williams	Byron Russell
Fred-Eric	Rex O'Malley
Shop Girls	Eleanor Prentiss and Kay Buckley
Alonzo	Marcel Rousseau
Drunk	Anton McQuade
Pansy	Phyllis Povah
Lollie Adams	Bertha Belmore
Alibassi	Georgia Sothern
Sam Hinkle	Lewis Charles
Charles Goodwin	Donald Randolph
Myrtle McGuire	Doro Merande
Mrs. Thompson	Emily Ross
Mrs. Davis	Frieda Altman
Miss Holmes	Edmonia Nolley
Emily	Rosemary Rice
Gladys	Mary Ashworth
Teddy Martin	Gil Maison
Sally Martin	Bernice Maison
First Judge	James Moore
Second Judge	William Torpey
Judge Taylor	John Souther
Mr. Goodwin	Judson Langill
Mrs. Goodwin	Marie Louise Dana
A Moving Man	George Cotton
Life Man	Tom Daly
A. P. Man	Ralph Lewis
State Trooper	Robert Downing
A Man	Ralph Glover

NEW YORK SUN
October 22, 1943

Actors and Trick Animals, But Very Little Play, in "The Naked Genius"

By WARD MOREHOUSE

A big, eager, Broadway-wise audience fairly hurtled into the Plymouth Theatre last night to see the first performance of a play that has caused more advance commotion than anything I can recall since "The Pearl of Great Price" came into our somewhat startled midst. This new comedy, as you surely suspect, is "The Naked Genius," by Gypsy Rose Lee.

Well, there was everything upon the Plymouth stage except a play. There were strip-tease queens, and one of them with a mother. There were trick dogs, a monkey and a rooster. There was an incredible wall clock which became a waterfall, with cherubs going round and round, as it struck the hour. There were people ascending and descending the fire-escape. Upon that stage, too, was a lot of Michael Todd's production money.

There was also Honey Bee Carroll, played by Joan Blondell, from out of the West. Now Honey Bee, the prize stripper of them all, occupies an apartment above a saloon in which skee ball is one of the pastimes. Every now and then this apartment irreverently reminds you of the scene of "You Can't Take It With You." A ghost-written book bearing Honey Bee's name has become a best-seller, giving her high ideas, to the deep distress and disgust of her tough-talking press agent. Her publisher's son has at least one idea. He wants to marry Honey Bee. So the scene shifts to Honey Bee's country house, Naked Acres, and along go the strip-tease artists, the monkey, the rooster, the dogs, the ladies' room attendant from the downstairs saloon, and the unruly fellow who wrote Honey Bee's book and who is howling for a lot of dough.

There is a wedding, all right, and one for which Honey Bee's mother, a gay old girl, has sold tickets and cut herself in on the refreshment racket, and there's ruction at the finish and a last-minute change in bridegrooms, which means little indeed in the life of our Honey Bee. She's quite dazzling in her wedding gown, more clothes than she ever had on in all her life.

Well, there's the play. Did I say play? It's a lark, a stunt, a spectacle, a whim, an animal act, a producing gesture on the part of Mr. Todd, but never a play. There are some funny scenes, very funny ones, because of several amusing characters, some incidental comedy and wonderful directorial touches— Mr. Kaufman's touches. He makes excellent use of the animals and I could have taken a lot more of them. Even the rooster, quite the most decorous performer on last night's stage.

Joan Blondell, absent from Broadway for these many years, returns from the films to play the role of Honey Bee. She plays it unflaggingly, but without great effect. I did not feel that she was more than moderately successful last night. She will undoubtedly get better results with this characterization in performances to come.

The nasal, laconic Millard Mitchell gives another of his first-rate, shuffling performances. Phyllis Povah has fine gusto as the mother of Honey Bee. Bertha Belmore, veteran trouper, who brought twinkling feet and the voice of a tragedian to "By Jupiter," has some very funny moments, and there is a grand performance by Doro Merande as Myrtle McGuire, of the ladies' room chores.

To me, "The Naked Genius" as a play, is even worse than I feared it could or would be. It presents the extraordinary case of being a property which was publicly forsworn by its author in Pittsburgh, and over which its director has been understandingly repentent. So now it's up to the uncontrite Mr. Todd—and the foot-loose, easy-come-easy-go playgoers of present-day New York.

Mr. Todd, the high-powered showman, who gave Broadway "Star and Garter" and "Something for the Boys," thinks he can put "The Naked Genius" over. Perhaps he will.

I wonder.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 22, 1943

Gypsy Rose Shows Very Little

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I can sort of understand why Gypsy Rose Lee and George S. Kaufman wanted *The Naked Genius* to close last week in Pittsburgh. In fact, what I can't understand is that they didn't take steps in the matter—didn't get out an injunction, or mutilate the scenery, or shanghai the cast. For the whole thing is an appalling mess, a silly and vulgar and embarrassing hodge-podge that wastes the time and withers the talent of a great many competent actors. If it achieved a merely negative effect, one could describe *The Naked Genius* as a farce that never gets written and call it quits. But the effect is positive, and pretty painful.

There is nothing in the least hopeless about the idea of *The Naked Genius*, which describes the scrambled private life of a strip-teaser who goes in for culture. It could have its points either as broad satire or as lunatic farce. Lunatic farce is indeed what it goes in for, straining after the unbridled antics and asylum atmosphere of a *You Can't Take It With You*. There are live monkeys in it, and cuckoo clocks that spout water, and trained dogs, and mauve milliners named Fred-Eric, and ladies-room attendants who come in from the fire-escape lugging stolen finery; and above all, there is the heroine's wedding, for which tickets are sold and which advertises in the paper for a judge to officiate.

• • •

These may sound like pretty hilarious goings-on; I can only warn you that they seem to go on forever, mirthlessly and desperately, to the accompaniment of panting and half-witted dialogue, of gags that don't dare wait for a laugh. And, what is worse, *The Naked Genius* somehow seems as tasteless as it is inept. It's not a question of burlesque-queen rowdiness—the show, in that sense, isn't rowdy at all; in fact, its labored daffiness destroys most of the feeling of sex. It's rather a matter of hammering away at references to such things as the ladies' room.

Joan Blondell plays the culture-loving Honey Bee Carroll as well, I suppose, as she can; but the effect, for me, is curiously unexciting. Such capable people as Millard Mitchell and Phyllis Povah are, through no fault of their own, in shackles throughout. Rex O'Malley manages to be unobjectionable as the milliner, and Bertha Belmore to be faintly amusing as a fashioner of G-strings. As the ladies'-room attendant, Doro Merande, through her look and voice rather than her lines, is at times really amusing; and her eventual appearance, as a bridesmaid in pink, gave me my one real laugh of the show.

Mr. Kaufman's direction keeps things moving; but I could only pray that they would stop.

"The Naked Genius"

NEW YORK TIMES
October 22, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Naked Genius"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THERE are sad and dreary tidings from Broadway this morning, sad tidings once again. For last night Mr. Todd, against the advice of friend and foe, brought in "The Naked Genius" to mock the world and to prove, alas, that Gypsy Rose Lee is a choice item only in person and not in manuscript. The little darling of the smile and the shining jewel or two has turned out one of the slowest items of the season, and she should be ashamed of herself. No bumps, no grinds, no cries of "take 'em off"—not even, to be blunt about it, a play that can hold the interest. Burlesque had more in the old days than the faintly polite bore now at the Plymouth.

• • •

Burlesque is Miss Lee's province, as no one in his right mind can deny, and it is of burlesque she writes. Her heroine is a runway queen who is trying to better herself by reading books and penning same and marrying into the educated classes you always find as publishers. Surrounding her are the friends of her profession—the tough manager with a heart of approximate gold, the rival stripper, the animal act; the menace is the man who wrote "The Naked Genius" under her name. At the last moment the lady says the devil with the publisher and takes the manager and presumably continues at the Gaiety.

From Gypsy the theatre had expected something rowdy, something with the color of the grand old days before License Commissioner Moss's smile became set and stern and wintry. It had expected the humor and the excitement of another item in her published works. But none of these things it received. Face to face with the muse on a stage without a runway, Miss Lee stood frozen, telling jokes that were not very good, moving from tiresome situation to another just alike. From Gypsy had come a love story that was practically girlish in its routine, a matter which, as everyone knows, was no respectful way to treat her friends.

• • •

To give Gypsy her due as a critic, she wished to close the play before it could see Broadway, as did George S. Kaufman, its director. The latter, who normally rushes a play along at breakneck pace, has slowed with this one, and only occasionally does it have the familiar touch. Joan Blondell, as the leading player, is okay for figure, manner and accent, and she seems to be having fun—all of which is proper. Millard Mitchell is the manager, and he, too, appears to have been around burlesque people long enough to know how they work. In the cast, almost entirely wasted, are many other good players: Rex O'Malley, Phyllis Povah, Bertha Belmore, Doro Merande, Frieda Altman, Gil Malson and his dogs, and even the renowned Georgia Sothern. But they can do nothing.

Mr. Todd might well have heeded the familiar cry from a couple of experts: "Take it off."

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 22, 1943

Naked Genius Stripped: A Dreary, Witless Mess

By BURTON RASCOE

FOR the first time in the history of the theater, I suspect, the author of a show (Gypsy Rose Lee, allegedly) and the director (George Kaufman) were going around for two weeks before their show (The Naked Genius) opened saying it was an odoriferoo and begging people to stay away from it.

I thought that was a gag. But they weren't kidding.

The thing opened at the Plymouth last night before a silently abashed audience, each member of which must have been grieving with shame at the embarrassment of some favorite in the huge cast, that he or she should be caught dead in so stupid and witless a mess. I thought when Hairpin Harmony was put on and taken right off, a few weeks ago, that the lowest point for all time in the way of a Broadway offering had been reached. The Naked Genius crawls under the point.

Will Fight Forfeit

My information is that the producer will keep this thing at the Plymouth for three weeks even if he has to give away tickets or shanghai people into the theater. For otherwise he forfeits $200,000 of the $350,000 which 20th Century-Fox paid for the tripe. The movie company already has made a $150,000 down payment. This is the biggest joke on somebody I have heard of since Gypsy Rose Lee, the stripper, was introduced as an intellectual litterateuse, whose favorite authors were James Joyce and Marcel Proust—a prest agent's happy thought which was seriously accepted by the entrepreneurs of a morning paper's annual Book and Authors forum and by the editors of the Book-of-the-Month Club.

According to an article by Earl Wilson in a recent issue of Liberty, George Jean Nathan is Michael Todd's adviser; The Naked Genius sounds as though it might have been written by him.

And It's No Joke

If you think I jest, I bid you examine Mr. Nathan's one published attempt at writing comedy, a collaboration he achieved in 1920 entitled Heliogabalus. You will find in it some of the same flat and corny lines and situations to be found in The Naked Genius.

Moreover, in Mr. Nathan's latest book, The Theater Book of the Year: 1942-43, a paste-up of his reviews of last season's Broadway offerings (in which, by the way, he devotes his most fulsome praise to Mr. Todd's Star and Garter) he offers what he admits is one of his few efforts at constructive criticism. He suggests that to get some novelty and humor into the strip-tease routine a stripper in her various unveilings reveals, tattooed on intimate portions of her torso, "portraits of Col. Darryl Zanuck, Dorothy Thompson and Bennet Cerf."

Mr. Todd omitted this novelty in The Naked Genius, but, since Mr. Nathan in his latest book also speaks in highest praise of animal acts, Mr. Todd has introduced Gil and Bernice Maison with their animal act, including a chimp and a kennel of trained dogs, into the proceedings, and they provide the one brief interlude of mild amusement in the whole dreary shebang. Mr. Nathan should certainly get a cut in on that movie money. Especially since he, who has made a career of walking out on shows at the end of the first act, stayed to the bitter end last night.

So Here's the Plot

The plot of The Naked Genius is about a strip-tease artiste who has hired a ghost to write a novel for her, which gets her featured as an intellectual. Her publisher, believing her to be the author of a book she herself hasn't even read, proposes marriage. She accepts because she has had a row with her manager, with whom she is in love. She is about to have a high-toned wedding, to which her mother sells tickets and rents out the washrooms of the stripper's country house to a female concessionaire, when the stripper decides she has been playing to the wrong crowd and leaves the groom at the altar for her burlesque-show manager.

I have liked Joan Blondell in the movies. I never suspected she hasn't the slightest sense of what acting on a stage is like. She was simply awful last night. Supporting her were such talented veterans of the stage as Bertha Belmore, Doro Merande, Phyllis Povah, Millard Mitchell and Rex O'Malley, more's the pity.

To the drama departments of all schools, colleges and universities:

Complying with the request of many drama professors, CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS announces that student subscriptions are now available on the same basis as last year.

Write for full particulars.

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

235 East 22nd Street . . . New York 10, N. Y.

"The Naked Genius"

NEW YORK POST
October 22, 1943

Miss Lee and Mr. Kaufman Were Right About "The Naked Genius"

By WILELLA WALDORF

MICHAEL TODD has done his best to let us all know in advance that "The Naked Genius" doesn't amount to much. From Pittsburgh last week he wired the New York papers that Gypsy Rose Lee, the author, and George S. Kaufman, the director, didn't care for the piece and were urging him to close it up. Advertisements have spread the happy tidings that it is "guaranteed not to win the Pulitzer Prize."

But what was Mr. Todd to do? Despite bad notices out-of-town, and the fact that nearly everybody connected with the play didn't like it, money poured steadily into the box-office. The screen rights were sold some time ago for $150,000, on a percentage arrangement that is expected to raise the figure to $350,000 at the very least.

Under the circumstances, few of last night's audience at the Plymouth Theatre could have gone expecting very much, and they didn't get much. "The Naked Genius" is a labored and exaggerated farce about the weird home life of a noted strip-tease artiste, and although the program notes that any similarity or resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental, it is probably based in a vague sort of way on Miss Lee's own colorful career.

Funny on Paper

A short outline of the idea for such a play must have sounded hilarious. On the stage it soon ceases to be more than mildly funny, even when liberally sprinkled with typical George S. Kaufman gags.

The spectacle of Honey Bee Carroll of the Gaiety Burlesque living elegantly with butler and maid in a one-room and kitchen flat above a saloon, with all sorts of odd characters wandering in and out via the fire escape, is amusing for a while, and it takes some time for the audience to inspect the contents of the room, decorated apparently, by an old established pawn shop.

While Honey buys sets of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, autographs copies of a book she not only did not write, but never read, and confesses that she touches up the drab backgrounds of some of the expensive oil paintings she invests in, it develops that her mother, after failing in the guinea pig business, has taken to selling stolen goods.

Such a show really should be rather comical, but once the idea and the background are established, there is nothing to amuse the customers but a stream of idiotic people coming on for a brief vaudeville turn, then fading away.

Wedding Guests Pay $5

For the second half of the evening, the scene shifts to Honey Bee's country house and the play reaches its climax in an elaborately staged wedding to which admission is charged for the community fund (plus a rake-off for mother) and a floor show is presented before the ceremony. Gil Maison's dog act, which includes a monkey, performs offstage for the most part, and Phyllis Povah, who plays mother, carries around a pet rooster, but by this time not even the entire Ringling Bros.-Barnum and Bailey Circus, complete with Gargantua, could have saved "The Naked Genius."

The audience was cool and the applause sparse. It is not surprising that Miss Lee and Mr. Kaufman implored Mr. Todd not to bring the show to Broadway, and it is especially sad because in it Joan Blondell is making her first stage appearance in twelve years. Miss Blondell is a good trouper who deserves a better break. She does everything she can to make "The Naked Genius" a riot, and so do the many excellent players in her supporting cast, but it is no use.

In any other season our review of this play would have ended with the paragraph above. This, however, is the season of 1943-4, when anything goes. No doubt Mr. Todd has another hit on his hands.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 22, 1943

Joan Blondell Stars in Gypsy Rose Lee Comedy at Plymouth Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

AGAINST the ardent wishes, the better judgemnt and the threatened law suits of Author Gypsy Rose Lee and Director George S. Kaufman, Producer Michael Todd literally dragged "The Naked Genius" last night onto the stage of the Plymouth Theatre. And, along with every ticket, including press seats and standing room, Mr. Todd guaranteed that the piece will receive the Pulitzer Prize. Never!

He may be right. He may be wrong. Heaven knows, with Joan Blondell Gypsy-Rose-Lee-ing all over the heart of 45th st., "The Naked Genius" is funnier than "The Skin of Our Teeth" ever was, especially after that Pulitzer Prize winner and Tallulah Bankhead parted company.

Nobody—not even Gypsy Rose herself—can tell me that Miss Lee, strip-tease artist, actress, novelist and now playwright, didn't write "The Naked Genius" with her tongue first in one cheek, then the other. From the rise of the curtain on Honey Bee Carroll's New York apartment to the fall of the curtain on Honey Bee Carroll's house in the country, she kids herself unmercifully.

If you take "The Naked Genius" in the tongue-in-cheek manner in which it is written, produced, acted and directed, you'll find it right smart fun. There are times when it is forced. There are times when it gets out of hand. There are times when it isn't as hilarious as it tries to be. But there are other times when it is slapstick farce at its most slapstick and farcical.

The story—surprise, surprise!—has to do with Honey Bee Carroll, a strip-tease artist who, on her professional way up from the square known as Union to the square known as Times, has learned how to tell a Goya from a Picasso. The trouble is, she hasn't learned the difference between a man-with-a-heart-of-gold and a bounder.

She does learn, however! But not until her mother, whose name is Pansy; her admirer, whose name is Charles Goodwin; her milliner, whose name is Fred-Eric; her fellow stripteaser, whose name is Alibassi, and her man-with-a-heart-of-gold, whose name is Stuart Tracy, have practically ruined her life and wrecked her reputation. There is also a villain—who—pursues—her.

All this—and quite a bit about which I haven't told you—is projected in the tongue-in-cheek spirit in which it is written. Joan Blondell has a Blondellian field day as Honey Bee Carroll. In bed or out, in town or country, in trouble or out of it, she plays with gaiety and gusto. Her sense of humor never fails her. Nor does her sense of timing.

Millard Mitchell is dry and true-to-type as the man-with-the-heart-of-gold who really loves her. Rex O'Malley is a man-milliner to believe in. His Fred-Eric had the folks in stitches. And I got a lot of good non-intellectual fun out of Phyllis Povah as Honey Bee Carroll's mother, Bertha Belmore as Lollie and Georgia Sothern as Alibassi . . .

Frankly, I don't think most professional first-nighters are going to care a great deal for "The Naked Genius." It's the Drama Critics' Award the piece at the Plymouth is NOT going to get. It is also my belief that the pay-as-you-enter customers are going to find it to their theatre-going liking. Last night, off the first floor aisles and up in the balconies, the laughter was long, loud and spontaneous. I, too, enjoyed it.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 22, 1943

Well, 'The Naked Genius' Finally Gets Here, So That's Over With

By JOHN CHAPMAN

MAYBE "The Naked Genius" could be made funny—but they'd have to throw it away and start all over again. As it stood last night at the Plymouth Theatre it was like an anecdote being told by some humorless bore who is always going around trying to tell gags he has picked up and laying eggs with them.

This play by Gypsy Rose Lee has had a weird career. Michael Todd, who is show-wise, bought it, and it must have sounded good in outline, for Michael persuaded George S. Kaufman, also showwwise, to direct it.

Nobody who wrote pieces for the papers liked the thing in Boston, but customers jammed the house at every tryout performance there. Similar experiences followed in Baltimore and Pittsburgh, and before "The Naked Genius" hit the big town last night it had had more advance publicity than "For Whom the Bell Tolls."

Could Be, Could Be

"Genius" could be funny. It is about a strip-tease star who writes a book—her autobiography—and almost marries into society. Trailing her are many characters who could be, and some who are, funny—an old doll who has the powder room concession in a saloon and sells hot underwear on the side; a seamstress of G-strings who is a disappointed opera singer; the proprietors of a dog act, with dogs; a swooning hat designer named Fred-Eric; another stripper named Alibassi ("you know, like alabaster; she wears white body paint") and many more.

What must have got Mr. Kaufman, unless it was just the director's fee, was the wedding scene finale, with all of the mad company, including dogs, putting on a show at a country estate for a village charity. It must have reminded him of "Once in a Lifetime," "You Can't Take It With You" and bank night. But if this is what got him, it threw him. Instead of being crisp and fast it was just a sad welter of desperate actors.

Joan Blondell Returns

As the naked genius, Joan Blondell returns from Hollywood after an absence of twelve years. She wears filmy negligees and a stripper's wedding gown; she has good curves; she does the stripper's strut and smiles engagingly. But somehow she does not sparkle. I think it is because she is too nice. She is, after all, a wife and mother.

Mr. Todd hasn't spared anything in the production. The first scene, designed by Frederick Fox, is a strip queen's strangely cluttered apartment above a low-grade saloon in New York, where anybody can walk in either through the door or through a fire escape window. It is amusing—and reminiscent of "You Can't Take It With You." Fox's second set is an attractive country place.

Through both places walk a couple of dozen characters—several pretty girls, just for decoration; Rex O'Malley, as a queenly hat designer; Georgia Sothern, the stripper, as herself; dauntless Bertha Bellmore as the Hattie Carnegie of the G-string; Millard Mitchell as the burlesque agent whom Miss Blondell really loves.

Of all these people, I liked Doro Merande and Phyllis Povah best. Miss Povah, as Miss Blondell's mother, scalps tickets for the wedding, sells the powder room concession and indulges in other flighty finance. Miss Merande, as the keeper of the ladies' room, is quite funny.

Last week Mr. Todd advised the press that he was bringing his play into New York despite the fact that the author, Gypsy R. Lee, and the director, George S. Kaufman, had begged him not to. I figured it was another of Michael's smart gags. Now I think he was telling the truth and duly report same out of fairness to the director and author.

"Othello"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 20, 1943

Majesty and Dignity Illuminate Negro Paul Robeson's 'Othello'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

MARGARET WEBSTER'S and the Theatre Guild's "Othello" is magnificent. Streamlined it may be, having been arranged in eight scenes and two acts; but it is no jazzed-up version of the stately splendors of Shakespeare. It is an "Othello" of depth and body and rich sound, and in its title role the Negro Paul Robeson has majesty.

Robeson, an immense man of commanding dignity, has a voice whose resonance and deepness almost pass belief—and my one unfriendly thought, as I sat last night in the Shubert Theatre, was wishing now and then that he would stop intoning and do something else with speech. Sometimes I found that what Shakespeare wrote as anguish — the heroic anguish of a man murder-bent—came out as song. As a specific instance I recall the line, "Why did I marry?" which comes soon after Iago has planted in Othello the first mustrust of Desdemona.

Ferrer as Iago

In all its major roles the casting of last night's classic tragedy is excellent. The role of Iago should be a cinch, for as it is written it is the quintessence of crafty villainy. But Jose Ferrer plays it as better than a cinch, for he brings to it a supple naturalness that makes it doubly malevolent. His poise and quiet are all the more insinuating because of their contrast with the grand opera qualities of Robeson's Othello.

This contrast heightens the drama in the eyes and ears of this spectator—and it does not detract from the admirable qualities of Mr. Robeson. Wily Iago steals reason from the mind of Othello, but the resourceful Ferrer does not steal the show from Robeson. If he did, there would be no show. He comes short of this mark, as is proper, and the first Negro to play the jealous Moor in the New York theatre is a man to think about, talk about and respect.

Uta Hagen's Desdemona

As Desdemona, the unhappy lass whom the implacable Moor must strangle, Uta Hagen is altogether appealing. Her slight, husky voice, which seems but a whisper, is uncannily clear and a tonal match for Robeson's sonorous outgivings. She seems the true, unworldly wife that Shakespeare wrote—feminine, submissive, puzzled and, finally, more resigned to her violent end than terrified of it.

Miss Webster, whose direction makes the play course smoothly through Robert Edmond Jones' workable setting, plays the handmaid Emilia—plays her with humor in the beginning and with dramatic intensity in the final scene. Jack Manning is interestingly presented as a prissy, foppish Roderigo. James Monks, who looks a bit like Errol Flynn, is a Cassio who, for me, sometimes fails to make the most of what he has to say and do.

This new "Othello," with a Negro in the title role making love to a white Desdemona, is worlds apart from being a theatrical trick. There is nothing cheap or titillating about it. It presents a black man of dignity and intelligence in the role of a black man of dignity and intelligence.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 20, 1943

Paul Robeson Stars in a Great Play

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AFTER many months of either empty or light-hearted playgoing, it has taken Shakespeare to give one the sense of sitting once again in the theater and watching a true and powerful drama enacted upon the stage. That return of the theater to its simplest and finest purpose makes *Othello* no less of an event than the magnificent presence of Paul Robeson in the title role. Other plays of Shakespeare may seem more exalted literature, but only one or two can challenge it as a work for the theater, as a *play*. It gathers momentum very slowly, but from the great Temptation Scene on, nothing in the drama moves under greater pressure or marches toward a more terrible catastrophe.

This is an *Othello* both rich in blessings and spotted with weaknesses. It is a better production than it was in Cambridge last Summer a year ago, but—by virtue of its full-dress presentation on Broadway—a production that must be subjected to severer scrutiny. It is perhaps fairest to assess the overall quality first, which is to say that once again Margaret Webster has directed Shakespeare with vigor and lucidity, making it always intelligible, always dynamic, and very often highly dramatic. This is, I think, her best job since *Hamlet*.

If it is not abundantly and splendidly Shakespearean in spirit and effect, the difficulties of *Othello* ever being so on the stage are obvious. The two great roles of the play have taxed the abilities of three centuries of actors. No one in this generation has seen those roles richly enough performed; for such an achievement we must go back (and even then take the judgment of our elders on trust) to the days of Booth and Irving. The roles were not richly enough performed last night, but all of Othello's presence and some of his power and nobility were expressed by Mr. Robeson, and a good share of Iago's suppleness and dexterity was expressed by Mr. Ferrer. The combination was harmonious, and it was often exciting.

• • •

Physically, and not in look alone, but in bearing, in voice, in grandeur of manner Paul Robeson is all that Othello could ever hope to be. Here stood revealed Shakespeare's most passionate and noble hero, though not—as Othello is—his most poetic one. Mr. Robeson has moderated the undue violence with which he played the role in Cambridge, and he gives a better reading to most of the great speeches. To the last two great ones, indeed, he brings a kind of magnificence. But he is a less moving figure than he ought to be, and not all his big scenes and speeches come off entirely right. There is a tendency at times to confuse solemnity with grandeur, and to assert his power by force of will rather than force of character. But where shall we find an Othello to equal him?

• • •

Mr. Ferrer has made great strides as Iago. His approach at Cambridge was too tentative, and he consistently underplayed for fear of overplaying, so that he could not stand up to Othello. The second most complex role in Shakespeare calls up for me something that Mr. Ferrer does not bring to it, some sense of a man whose "motiveless malignity" lies in his hating goodness because he was born without a sense of it, and fiendishly resents a quality that he cannot feel. That deep Mr. Ferrer cannot go. But he conveys the workings of Iago's mind, the dexterity of his method, with uncommon intelligence; he works on Othello pretty convincingly; and his reading of Shakespearean verse is very skillful and flexible. His is an animated Iago without being a crude or melodramatic one.

Uta Hagen's Desdemona is properly sweet and submissive and troubled, which is about all one can ask of a role that is dramatically pretty thankless. Miss Webster's Emilia has the virtue of being lively and the weakness of not seeming lusty. James Monks has the attractiveness but not the strength of Cassio; and the minor characters are for the most part satisfactory. Robert Edmond Jones has contrived some simple and easily worked sets.

Othello is the drama that Broadway needs but that nobody living seems able to write.

NEW YORK SUN
October 20, 1943

'Othello,' as Done by Guild and Miss Webster, Provides Exciting Evening

By WARD MOREHOUSE

SHAKESPEARE came back to Broadway and the Theater Guild began its season last night with a stirring production of the tragedy of "Othello." Paul Robeson, the first Negro of modern times to appear in a New York presentation, gives a giant's stature and remarkable clarity and vitality to his role, but the evening's honors he must share with Margaret Webster all the way.

This play of Iago's hellish schemings and the Moor's severe struggle between love and suspicion is one that has been given at intervals before American audiences for nearly 200 years. Now it comes to the stage of the Shubert in a production to which Miss Webster brings perception and great skill. Her direction is quick and inventive and the pace of the performance is thus heightened. In a play in which the action begins in the first scene, in the very first moments, it has been her purpose to see that there is no let-up. To my notion she succeeds admirably.

Paul Robeson takes over a role which has been done by Booth and Barrett, by Salvini and Robert B. Mantell, and comparatively recently by such players as Walter Huston, Philip Merivale and Walter Hampden. Mr. Robeson played the Moor in London a dozen years ago and returned to the part, an immeasurably improved actor, for summer-theater presentations in Cambridge and Princeton. In his performance last evening at the Shubert he gave a portrayal of great resonance, vitality and fluency, and one surpassing any Othello within my experience. He brings majesty and power to the role, as well as pathos and terror.

The Iago of this Guild-Webster production is strikingly performed by Jose Ferrer—casually, colloquially and with great slyness and craftiness. An agile Iago he is and slender and a mite of a figure in contrast with the towering Robeson, but their scenes together have great excitement.

Uta Hagen is a lovely and tormented Desdemona and reads her verse beautifully. And Miss Webster, in addition to her direction, comes through with a fiery performance as Emilia and quite takes over the play in her big scene near the finish.

The casting is good throughout. That rising young actor, James Monks, certainly to be remembered from "The Eve of St. Mark," is a first-rate Cassio. There is an excellent performance by Jack Manning, who makes Roderigo something quite less than a half-wit. As directed and as played, all the Iago-Roderigo scenes contribute a great deal to the speed and force of the production. Averell Harris is the Brabantio, Robert E. Perry the Duke, Philip Huston the Lodovico and Edith King the Bianca. All are excellent.

Robert Edmond Jones has done a masterful job of designing and lighting. All values considered, it is an exciting show and a presentation of which both the Guild and Miss Webster may be proud. In a brief curtain speech Miss Webster paid tribute to Paul Robeson.

The record for consecutive New York performances of "Othello" is held by Walter Hampden, who played the role fifty-seven times, and also in the theater bearing the name of Sam S. Shubert.

This new and now current "Othello," a notable addition to the Broadway of the moment, should far exceed Mr. Hampden's mark.

"Othello"

NEW YORK POST
October 20, 1943

Paul Robeson a Striking "Othello" at the Shubert

By WILELLA WALDORF

MARGARET WEBSTER and Paul Robeson, with the assistance of Jose Ferrer and Uta Hagen, a good cast and Robert Edmond Jones as designer, last night gave Broadway its finest production of "Othello" in years. With it the Theatre Guild opened its 26th subscription season in distinguished fashion at the Shubert Theatre.

"Othello" is admittedly difficult to stage. It is occasionally presented adequately, but seldom manages to achieve the dramatic vigor and emotional appeal that only a combination of brilliant direction and inspired casting can produce.

In the course of our Broadway theatre-going which goes back only to the early twenties, we have seen Walter Huston, Philip Merivale, Fritz Leiber and Walter Hampden play Othello. Of the four, Mr. Hampden's was the most satisfying portrayal, though hardly the sort of electrifying performance that sticks in the memory over a period of years.

Nor were the English versions that we happen to have encountered, including that of Mr. Robeson himself in London some thirteen years ago, anything to send us from the theatre in a state of ecstasy. After the extravagant praise accorded Mr. Robeson by the London critics at that time, in fact, we expected a good deal and found him definitely disappointing.

The Robeson Voice

What Mr. Robeson needed, apparently, was a director like Margaret Webster and time to grow into the part, for he is now a tremendously impressive embodiment of the famous Moor about whose countenance so many Shakespearean authorities have argued.

Mr. Robeson has the physique, the dignity and the noble quality the role demands, and, above all, a speaking voice that does full justice to its poetry. His tortured reaction to Iago's scheming is immeasurably more effecting now than it was in London thirteen years ago, when he did much more sweating and groaning.

Toward the end of last night's performance, to be sure, his deep organ tones became a trifle monotonous. There was moments during the scene in which Desdemona was strangled that we ceased to believe in him. But for the most part he is a fascinating Moor. At its best, this production of "Othello" stirs an excitement that is seldom experienced in the theatre these days.

Ferrer's Iago

Jose Ferrer's Iago will require a few mental readjustments on the part of most theatre-goers before he comes into his own. He is an unusual Iago, and for a time last night he struck us as too light, too ineffectual, in the role. But Mr. Ferrer is a clever actor. He grows on you. Furthermore, by the time his plottings were well under way, he had not only convinced us that he was a wily and deceptive villian, but that he was quite capable of fooling Othello without making the Moor look like a simpleton to be so imposed upon.

In this, Mr. Robeson's blackness was a great asset. It helped to make plausible what is almost always a stumbling block in "Othello." It helped to explain why he was so ready to believe that Desdemona could be unfaithful to him. He was different from the men around him. He could never quite convince himself that she had ever actually fallen in love with him.

A Lovely Desdemona

Uta Hagen, as Desdemona, did convince us, however, that she had fallen in love with the blackman. Hers is a lovely Desdemona, simple, unaffected and beautifully spoken.

James Monks makes a good Cassio and the supporting company is far superior to the usual Shakespearean troupe. Curiously enough, Miss Webster's Emilia is the least effective of the major performances. Emilia, to be sure, has always struck us as a bit of a booby not to know until too late what her wily husband was up to, but she does redeem herself in the end.

Miss Webster rises to the occasion well, but she is not an ideal Emilia. Her direction, however, does so much to make Shakespeare stirring and heady stuff in the theatre instead of the usual dull classroom exercise that her Emilia is, after all, a minor point. "Othello" ranks among Miss Webster's most notable achievements, up there with "Richard II" and the full-length "Hamlet."

'OTHELLO'

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by Margaret Webster; production designed and lighted by Robert Edmond Jones; presented by the Theater Guild at Sam S. Shubert Theater Tuesday evening, October 19, 1943. The cast:

Roderigo	Jack Manning
Iago	Jose Ferrer
Brabantio	Averell Harris
Othello	Paul Robeson
Cassio	James Monks
Duke	Robert E. Perry
Lodovico	Philip Huston
A messenger	Henry Barnard
First Senator	Jack de Shay
Second Senator	Graham Velsey
Third Senator	John Ireys
Desdemona	Uta Hagen
Montano	William Woodson
First soldier at Cyprus	Sam Banham
Second soldier at Cyprus	Eugene Stuckmann
Third soldier at Cyprus	Bruce Brighton
Emilia	Margaret Webster
Bianca	Edith King
Gratiano	Robert E. Perry

Senators, soldiers, servants and citizens: Martha Falconer, Timothy Lynn Kearse, David Koser, John Gerstad, Jeff Brown, Albert Hachmeister and Ronald Bishop.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 20, 1943

Guild's Othello a Triumph Unbelievably Magnificent

By BURTON RASCOE

IF YOU are one of those of the impatient legion who are annoyed because they can't get tickets for Oklahoma! you are going to have another problem presently—unless you are quick and smart—and that is, how to get tickets for Othello. For make no doubt about it, the Theatre Guild Production of this Shakespearean drama, which registered such a roaring hit when it opened at the Shubert last night and the canyons of Times Square echoed the applause for a full 20 minutes after the final curtain, is one of the most memorable events in the history of the theater.

It is my firm, solemn and humble belief that there has never been and never will be a finer rendition of this particular tragedy than the one now offered us. It is unbelievably magnificent. And, since Othello represents Shakespeare's highest achievement in sheer theatrical entertainment and is one of the four or five finest products of his genius, there has simply been nothing on Broadway in years to earn our gratitude to the theater more profoundly than does this offering of the Theater Guild's.

Never in my life have I seen an audience sit so still, so tense, so under the spell of what was taking place on the stage as did the audience at the Shubert last night. And few times in my life have I witnessed so spontaneous a release of feelings in applause as that which occurred when the tragedy was ended. It was a tribute to something fine, something thrilling, something great.

Ferrer's Iago

The star is Paul Robeson; but, sublimely cast as he is as the Moor and moving and magnificent as his performance was, the highest acting honors, as I see it, must go to Jose Ferrer as Iago and to Uta Hagen as Desdemona. It has immemorially been a commonplace that Iago steals the show; but Mr. Ferrer's interpretation goes far beyond the prodigal opportunities of the part. It is a character creation of the first magnitude, played in a manner I daresay you never saw it played before.

The traditional way of playing Iago is to make him essentially weak, crafty, cringing, eaten with envy, a low worm taking a despicable revenge for his failure to be elevated by the Moor to a military rank second only to the Moor's own. Mr. Ferrer's Iago is plainly criminal, of the type that used to be called (and perhaps still is) dementia praecox katatonia—that is, devoid of the capacity to feel, an imbecile emotionally. Such were Hauptmann and Landrau and the mass murderer of Hamburg. This type of criminal is often extremely intelligent, clever, cool-headed, egotistical, disdainful of the minds and emotions of normal human beings. Mr. Ferrer's Iago is all that and is superb—natural, utterly convincing; he is the epitome of egomania, cynicism and passionless evil.

That Mr. Ferrer's interpretation has profound validity is to be found in Iago's key speech, his last: "Demand me nothing; what you know, you know: From this time forth I'll never speak a word." In the shadow of death, on the way to the gallows, such a criminal never shows the slightest emotion of regret or fear. He is defiant, the supreme egoist to the last. Mr. Ferrer portrays such a creature with breath-taking reality. Moreover, he flouts one of Hamlet's precepts to the players, with marvelous effect. He does not let his speech come "trippingly to the tongue" but speaks with the slow, cool, natural deliberation of a criminal plotter who is utterly sure of himself.

Robeson Fine

Miss Hagen, who is very beautiful, is Desdemona as she is described in the play—"the sweetest innocent that e'er did lift an eye." Trusting naivete, plaintive bewilderment, suppliant misery—these moods Miss Hagen sustains in a glorious and heart-gripping performance.

Mr. Robeson's magnificent and tremendous voice is in perfect character with his fine portrayal of Othello as a good but stupid barbarian, a brawny man of battle rather than a man of civilized society, a simple, savage soul. Margaret Webster (who also directed the play) is a wonderful Emilia; and special laurels also are tossed from this corner to Averell Harris, Jack Manning, Robert Perry, James Monks, Philip Huston and Edith King.

The Bard, I think, would stand in awed gratitude not only to the players for their performance but to the over-all beauty of the production, including the sets and lighting by Robert Edmond Jones and the incidental music, composed by Tom Bennett. Not so incidentally, this is one Shakespearean performance in which every word uttered on the stage is clear and distinct. So it is a triumph in every way.